



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Conviction of Belarusian Non-Partisan Election Monitors

As delivered by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
September 7, 2006

Mr. Chairman,

The recent convictions in Belarus of four independent election observers from the non-partisan monitoring group Partnership once again raises serious concerns about Belarus' ongoing harassment of civil society.

On August 4, a court in Minsk sentenced these young election monitors to prison terms ranging from six months to two years for running an "unregistered" organization. The Belarusian authorities arrested the observers in February, just before the March elections. We also express our concern regarding the August 30th eviction of the Writers' Union from its headquarters. These actions are the latest example of a disturbing pattern by the Belarusian authorities to intimidate civil-society activists and to erode further the democratic process in Belarus through legalistic means.

As we have done in the past, the United States will take steps to impose appropriate sanctions on those responsible for abusing the rights of Belarusian citizens. We condemn the authorities' actions, and call on the Belarusian government to honor its OSCE commitments, especially regarding freedom of speech and assembly, and to release these innocent observers immediately.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.